NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

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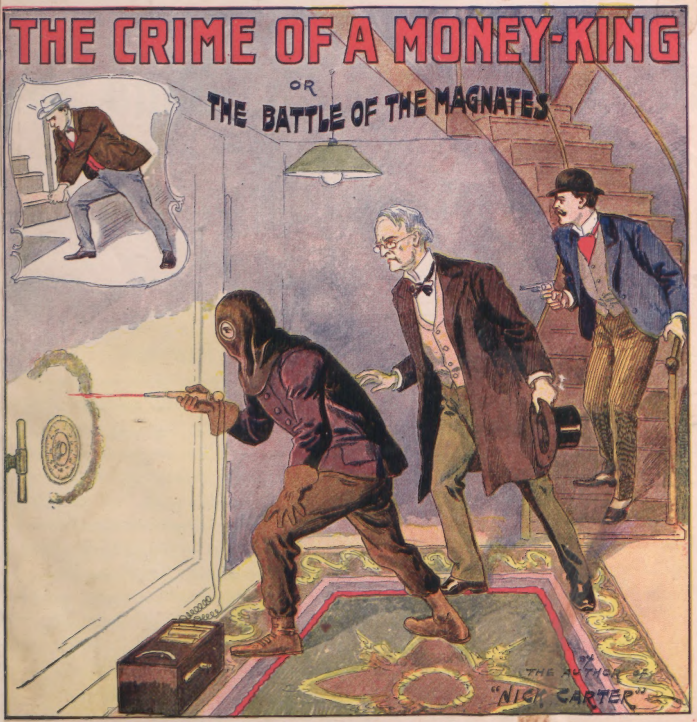
THE CRIME OF A MONEY-KING

OR

THE BATTLE OF THE MAGNATES



With his electrical boring and burning machine, he went to work at the safe, and in a short space of time it was a total wreck.

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THE CRIME OF A MONEY KING;

OR,

The Battle of the Magnates.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPITALIST'S STRONG ROOM.

"There is the wreck, Mr. Carter. Now let me see what you can make of it?" and the speaker pointed into the room through the open door, indicating, as he did so, a chaos of confusion such as only can be left behind by expert burglars, who have made use of powerful explosives to accomplish their ends.

"Has anything been disturbed, since you discovered that you had been robbed?" asked the detective.

"Nothing. Not a soul has crossed this threshold, sir," replied the financier.

"You do not, of course, include yourself in that category," remarked the detective, turning a smiling face toward his client.

"Indeed, but I do. I have said that not a soul has crossed this threshold since the discovery of the crime. I mean that, literally."

"What, sir? Do you mean that you have not even investigated the demolished safe in order to discover the extent of your losses?"

"I haven't investigated a thing. I haven't touched a thing. I have not entered this room. The moment I discovered what had happened, I determined that if the rascals had left a possible clew to their identities behind them, it should not be effaced or destroyed by any act of mine."

"Humph!" said Nick, pondering a moment. "In that case," he added, presently, while he reached out one hand and closed the door which the financier had

thrown open before them, "I think we will leave it undisturbed for a while."

"Do you mean that you do not wish to go inside the room now?"

"Not just yet, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because it is one of my plans to begin at the beginning of a case, whenever that is possible. Unfortunately, in most cases it is utterly impossible. I have to begin in the middle and work both ways. Just now there is no such necessity."

"I'm afraid that I do not understand you, Mr. Carter."

"Sit down, then, and I will explain."

The room into which they had peered for a moment only, and which seemed in that one moment to have been so entirely wrecked by the marauders who had visited it, was situated in a windowless extension, which had been erected at the rear of the back parlor, or library, of the mansion occupied by the man who at that time was looked upon as one of the world's greatest and most successful financiers.

The library, in which the great man and the detective now seated themselves, was often described by the capitalist as his workshop. The walls were covered with bookshelves, which groaned beneath the weight of the books they held, and in the center of the room was a great, square, flat-top desk littered with papers. It was here where the great man worked and labored over his figures, his schemes, the formation of syndicates and trusts, his banking accounts and whatever interested him after his office had closed for the day.

It was here where he received secretly other capitalists whenever they had in hand some great operation concerning which it was necessary to confer and to plan; and it was here where coups had been arranged in which they had had played with millions, as a street arab plays with pennies and marbles.

The back room beyond it—the windowless room—the wrecked room, as it might now appropriately be called, was one of even greater and deeper mysteries.

The financier had built it there himself long after he purchased the house, and it had been constructed entirely according to plans made by himself.

And it was a remarkable room.

It was fireproof, and was supposed to be burglar proof as well.

As great care had been devoted to its construction as is ever devoted to the erection of a safe deposit institution for the financial section of the city, where hundreds of millions of dollars in securities are deposited for safe keeping.

The room was windowless, as has been said. There was not even a skylight in the ceiling. Not a ray of daylight, save what sifted through the door which opened into the library, had ever found its way into that apartment since it was built, and yet a person never realized that fact, if by any chance he was permitted to enter there, because of the masterly arrangement of the electric lights which, enveloped in scientifically constructed globes, produced exactly the effect of daylight.

Ventilation? Ah! yes; there was ventilation. The architect had provided for that in a way known only to themselves—and to the capitalist for whom they designed it.

The room of the Venetian Council of Ten, when the terrible rule of the Doges was enforced, was no more secret, and, in a sense, more terrible, than the tomblike room.

It was smaller by ten feet than the outer surface of the walls which surrounded it.

The ceiling was dome-shaped, painted blue, and studded with stars in gilt, to represent the sky which never could be seen from inside its walls; and in the very center of that dome was a huge ground glass bulb or globe from which a soft, white light was radiated.

and there were other bulbs and globes in other places to add to that light when desired.

A thick, heavy, velvet carpet covered the floor. A long table, covered with billiard cloth, extended through the center of it, and arranged around the table were twelve high-backed, carved, mahogany chairs, upholstered in leather—five on each side of the table, and one at either end of it. There was a revolving bookcase at one end of the table, the shelves of which were always nearly empty—save when there was to be a meeting held there, and then it became filled in a mysterious manner—filled with the books desired for that special occasion; with books which disappeared after the meeting had adjourned.

And there was no other furniture in that room.

But there was a vault under it. A vault to which approach was had only by descending a flight of iron stairs, situated at one end of the strange room, and at the bottom of which the visitor was confronted by a heavy metal door, supplied with a time lock of the latest and most approved pattern; and beyond that door there were other doors still, supplied with combination locks.

Passing those doors, the vault extended almost entirely under the room above it—extended, in fact, to the limit of the thick walls which have already been referred to.

In the room itself, over the vault, there were safes—three of them.

One was a huge affair which might well have done service in a bank with an extensive business—a safe which, as far as appearances went, should have defied any and all attempts to crack it. Another was less bulky, but still a large safe—larger than most men would require for their household uses.

The third one was a small affair, and stood against the wall almost within reach of the chair at the upper end of the table.

And yet, taken by itself, even this third safe was by no means diminutive. One might easily have stowed away a fortune inside it.

And now, if you please, we will return to the library where Jared Logan, capitalist, and Nick Carter, detective, were facing each other across the flat-top desk already mentioned.

"Before attempting to find out what you do not know," said Nick, smiling across the table at his client, "I think it would be well to ask a few questions in order to discover what you do know. It is now half-past eight o'clock in the morning—approximately forty minutes since you telephoned for me to come here with all speed."

"Yes; it was a quarter of eight when I discovered that I had been robbed."

"But, my dear sir, you have not discovered that you have been robbed."

"The devil I haven't! I'd like to know what you call it, then."

"According to your own statement, you have not crossed that threshold since you discovered that some person, or persons, have made use of explosives inside the room."

"Correct; I haven't. I wished——"

"Yes; you have already told me why; but the fact remains that, not having investigated, you do not know that you have been robbed."

"Humph! Well, I'm not green enough to suppose that a burglar, who is expert enough to get inside that room at all, and get away after it—who is sufficiently master of his profession to blow open those safes in the way it has been done, as we can see from the doorway, is also a fool."

"Probably not."

"If he could do all that, he could also get at what is inside those safes, couldn't he?"

"Without doubt."

"And finding things of value there, after he has

taken all the trouble to get at them, he would not be likely to go away again and leave them there, would he?"

"Hardly."

"Well, then, the deduction—as you detectives put it—is that I have been robbed."

"Certainly."

"It seems to me that we are uselessly wasting time, Mr. Carter."

"Perhaps; and yet I never waste time when I am engaged in work of this kind. It is certain that somebody has been inside that room and that explosives have been used there. Who has used them?"

"That is what I want you to find out."

"You have already told me that you heard nothing in the night."

"Not a sound."

"No suspicion of an explosion near you, came to you or to any member of your household?"

"Not a suspicion."

"And yet it would seem that an explosion, sufficiently powerful to do the damage that has been wrought there, would have shook the house like an earthquake."

"It would seem so; but it didn't."

"You have questioned everybody in the house?"

"Everyone of them."

"And not one of them felt a shock, or heard a suspicious noise during the night?"

"Not one—if they tell me the truth, and I suppose they do that."

"You say that you opened the door into the strong room at a quarter to eight?"

"Yes; within a minute or two of that time."

"Of course you pressed the button which turns on the lights in there before you opened the door?"

"I always do that."

"So that, when you did throw the door open, yo saw instantly what had happened?"

"Instantly; yes."

"Is it not strange that you did not rush into th room at once?"

"No; I do not think so."

"Why?"

"Because I am not given to impulsive acts. If were, I would be a poor man instead of a rich one; failure instead of a success."

"What was your first appreciable emotion upon mak ing the discovery you did?"

"Anger, I think."

"Naturally; but what was your impulse, even if yo did not act upon it?"

"To swear."

"Doubtless. Did you swear?"

"I am afraid I did."

"But you did not enter the room?"

"No; I did not. I have told you that often enou for you to know it by this time."

"Did you not feel an impulse to enter it, even thoug you did not do so?"

"No; I did not."

"Why not?"

"I can't tell you, only that I did not. I thought i stantly that I had been robbed. I thought I knew wh had been stolen, or what the robbers had attempted steal. I realized that if I were to catch the robbe you were the man to do it, and that if I expected y to do it, I must not place an obstacle in your w That is about the best explanation of my conduct t I can give you."

CHAPTER II.

AN EXPLOSION WHICH MADE NO NOISE.

"So you stepped back and closed the door at once asked the detective.

"Well, not precisely at once. I think I stood

ome time, looking into the room before I decided what o do."

"But you did not call anybody?"

"Certainly not. It was my own affair. Nobody lse's."

"That is true. When you did turn away, what did ou do?"

"I came here to this desk; to this telephone and alled you up."

"And then—after that?"

"I looked in at the door again."

"For what purpose?"

"To study the wreck, I suppose."

"And to wonder why you had not been disturbed y the noise of the explosion?"

"Yes; just that."

"And after that——"

"I closed the door again and called the servants."

"Did you call them to this room?"

"No; I went to the dining room and summoned them ugiere."

"Did you tell them what had happened?"

"Certainly not. I am not in the habit of telling my isiness to my servants."

"What did you say to them?"

"I asked them if anyone of them had heard a noise ke an explosion in the night, or if any of them had een disturbed by a noise."

"And none of them had?"

"Not one of them."

"You did not miss one of them in making your inuiries?"

"No; I did not make a personal inquiry of each one, t I directed the butler to do so."

"So you really received your report from him?"

"Yes."

"Satisfied on that point, what did you do next?"

"On the contrary, I was greatly dissatisfied on that point."

"Very likely; nevertheless, what did you do next?"

"I made the same inquiries of the members of my family."

"All of them?"

"Certainly."

"And did you tell them, or anyone of them, what had happened?"

"No. I do not discuss my business affairs with my family."

"What reason did you give for making the inquiry?"

"I pretended that I had been so disturbed during the night, and wished to know if any others had experienced the same disturbance."

"Well?"

"They concluded that I had been dreaming. Not one of the members of my family had heard a sound, which was unusual, or had been disturbed in any way, as far as I could determine."

"And then——"

"I came here to the library to await your arrival. You came within ten minutes, I should say, after I returned to this room."

"During that ten minutes, did you open the door into the strong room again?"

"I did not."

"You merely sat here and waited for me?"

"That is all."

"So that at the present moment, to the best of your knowledge, and aside from the burglars themselves, you and I are the only persons who are aware of the condition of that room, or that a robbery has been even attempted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Mr. Logan, I suppose you are provided with a list of everything that was in that room when you closed it before you retired last night."

"No; I haven't exactly a list; but I can readily make one from my books, and with the aid of my memory. The list itself is now—or, at least, was—in that room, in the small safe. I consider that room the safest place of deposit within my reach."

"Naturally. You were in the strong room last night, were you?"

"I was."

"For a long time?"

"An hour or more; I do not remember exactly."

"Where were you? I mean in what part of the room were you?"

"I was down below in the vault most of the time."

"Was this door open while you were there?"

"Certainly not. I always locked myself in the room when I went into it."

"And you did not neglect that precaution last night?"

"No; I did not."

"What time did you leave the strong room?"

"A few minutes after midnight."

"How is the outer door of the vault fastened?"

"With a time-lock."

"Did you set the time-lock when you left it last night?"

"Yes."

"For what time?"

"For half-past seven o'clock this evening. I had arranged for a meeting of some gentlemen in that room, for that hour."

"And you wished to have access to the vault while they were here?"

"Yes."

"From the door where we looked into the strong room, the door of the vault cannot be seen. Have you an idea that the vault has been blown open, like the safes?"

"No; to tell the truth I have not."

"Why?"

"Because I do not think that in the time at the d posal of the burglars—that is from after midnight l night until seven forty-five this morning—any burg in the world could work his way into that vault. think you will find the vault all right."

"I see. It was because you felt that the vault w all right in any case, that you were content not enter the room until my arrival."

"I have already told you why I waited."

"Your most valuable papers were, of course, in vault?"

"No; they were not. That is the devil of it."

"Eh? How is that?"

"There were securities and documents in the th safes which I would not care to lose."

"Doubtless. Now, Mr. Logan, I suppose you anxious to get to your office."

"Indeed I am. It is important that I should at once."

"I can see that by your evident nervous haste in plying to my questions. When will you be able to turn here?"

"At five o'clock this afternoon."

"Very good. Then I will meet you here at o'clock."

"What! Aren't you going to investigate room?"

"Not until you are ready to investigate it with n

"But——"

"When you are at liberty to give me two hours more of your time, we will go in there together, if will be good enough to have your list ready so we can check off the things, documents, securi papers, etc., as we find them."

"But I supposed that I could leave you here to w while I was downtown."

Nick smiled.

"Mr. Logan," he said, "would you have given

e run of that room, and of everything inside it yester-
y? I don't think you would—and I don't want it
w."

"Humph! All right. I see the point. In that case
will meet you here at three o'clock instead of five."

"Very good. Three o'clock be it; and don't forget
list."

CHAPTER III.

THREE KEYS TO THE PRIVATE DOOR.

As Nick Carter rose to take his departure he paused,
d, leaning with one hand on the table between them,
said to the capitalist:

"Mr. Logan, how many keys are there to that door
-the door which admits you from this room into the
rong room?"

"Three."

"Where are they?"

"One of them—the one I make constant use of—is
my pocket."

"Very well; and the others?"

"Of the other two, one is locked in a drawer in the
rivate safe in my office in Wall Street, and the other
in a safe deposit vault."

"Where?"

"At the Finance and Credit Company's bank."

"Very good. Now I am going to make a strange
equest of you before we part."

"What is it?"

"I wish you would give me now the key to that
oom you have in your pocket; also an order, through
ne of your clerks or your confidential man, whom you
ill send to meet me, for the key deposited at the
nance and Credit Company's bank; and also send to
e, by the messenger who will meet me there, the key
at is in the private safe at your office."

"What in the world——"

"I beg that you will not question me—simply that you will humor me. You know I have peculiar and rather original methods of work."

"Yes; and it strikes me that this is both peculiar and original."

"You have no objection?"

"None whatever; it shall be as you request."

"Thank you."

"You might get in the carriage with me. We will drive directly to the bank and get the key that is there, and then continue on to the office for the other one. In the meantime, I can give you this one now. It is an unusual thing to permit these keys to go out of my possession, sir; I cannot imagine why you should desire it."

"I will tell you. You have already told me that you have not entered that room since you discovered that somebody had broken into it. Now there is one peculiar fact which in the excitement seems to have escaped your attention."

"What is that?"

"The very simple one that although there has been a very general wreck inside that room the room itself was not broken into. There seems to be no indication that this door has been tampered with."

"By thunder! You are right. I had not thought of that."

"And of course this is the only entrance to that room, is it not? The only means of gaining access to it?"

"Certainly it is."

"Very well, then. Somebody, unknown to you, has entered that room. Whoever did enter it, has made use of a key in doing so. You say there are only three keys in existence, one of which is in your pocket at the present moment."

"That's right."

"And I infer that the key now in your pocket has not been out of your possession?"

"It certainly has not—not since it was made for me at the time the place was built."

"Good. Now do you appreciate what follows your declarations?"

"Suppose you tell me."

"Why, either that there is a fourth key to that room, since the parties who entered it undoubtedly made use of a key; or that one of the three keys you have mentioned was used."

"You are right. That is as plain as the nose on your face."

"Consequently, if you insist that the key in your pocket has never been out of your possession, and if there is no fourth key—and the likelihood is that there is not—one of the remaining keys—the one at the bank or the one at your office—is missing."

"No doubt of that."

"Now, another question before we start."

"Well?"

"Have you ever made use of either of the other keys?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean, have they been kept where they are now, ever since the vaults were built, and have you made a practice of using only this one, or have you interchanged them at intervals?"

"I have never turned the lock of that door with either of them but once, and that was when they were placed in my hand when the room was completed. I tried them at that time to see if they would fit; after that I deposited them at once as I have told you and have never made use of them since that time."

"Very good. Now one of the reasons why I wish to go for those keys is of course to see if they have been undisturbed where you placed them; and the other is that I do not care that you shall have an opportunity yourself to enter that room now until after I h examined it."

"What in thunder do you mean by that?"

The capitalist started in anger, but Nick only smi as he added:

"I know perfectly well that you have no inten nor desire to do so; but I also know that you can n foresee the exigencies which might arise in your b ness. Now, for instance, if when you arrive at office you should find that you greatly needed cer papers which are in that room, you would not hesi to go there after them—supposing that the burg have left them there. There would be no objec to such a proceeding on your part—that is, no g objection, for you would explain to me afterward you had been there, what you had done, and what had disturbed."

"Well, then?"

"If I have the three keys in my possession, could not get into that room unless I was pres You would not be prevented from entering it, but would have to send for me before you did so."

"All right. That is a good idea. Shall we go no

"Yes; to meet here again at three o'clock."

"All right. Here is one of the keys. We will dr directly to the bank and secure the other one, and t to my office for the third one. Is that the idea?"

"Exactly."

In due course of time both of the keys referre were turned over to the detective, for both were covered easily where they had been deposited.

As Nick took leave of the financier at his d door, he said:

"I now have the three keys in my possession seems evident that none of these keys has been use enter the strong room, and that, therefore, there be a fourth key. However, we will not go into now. You will be sure to meet me at three o'clock?

"Certainly, I will be there on the minute."

"Then I will get along. I hope you will be prepared to devote the remainder of the afternoon—and evening also, up to the time when you expect the gentleman for that meeting you mentioned. I believe you said that was to be at half-past seven?"

"Yes; I had forgotten it for the moment. I hope, by the way, that you can finish your investigation so that we can have things straightened up a little by that time."

"Oh, there is no doubt of that."

When Nick left the Wall Street office, he hurried directly to police headquarters, arriving there a few minutes before ten o'clock, and just in time to meet Inspector McClusky in the corridor.

"Good," he said. "I want five minutes alone with the inspector."

"Nothing easier, Nick. Come right in," was the reply; and as soon as they were seated together in the private office, he added:

"What's up now, old man?"

"I want you to do me a great favor."

"Indeed! How much do you want?" smiled the inspector.

"Nonsense! I want a witness to a certain little thing I am about to do, and I do not want anybody but you to be that witness."

"Oho! Something doing, eh?"

"Yes; a lot."

"What's up, Nick?"

"Old Crœsus—otherwise Jared Logan—has been robbed."

"You don't say so?"

"You, of course, know the strong room he had built directly behind the library of his Fifth Avenue house?"

"I have heard about it; I have never seen it."

"Well, it is like Kansas City was ten days after the cyclone; you ought to see it now."

"What's the matter with it?"

"It looks as if a cyclone had struck it."

"Blown up, eh?"

"Yes; I haven't been inside it yet, since the explosion, because I wouldn't go into it unless the old man was with me. He wanted me to make my examination while he was downtown attending to business to-day, but I backed."

"Quite right."

"But as a matter of fact, I do want to see it in the meantime."

"Oho! That is the game, is it?"

"That is just the game—or, rather, that is only a part of it."

"What's the rest of it?"

"I'm not going to disturb anything, or even to make a very thorough examination, until old Crœsus is with me, but there are certain little things which I would like to arrange inside that room before he enters it with me, and I want you to witness them."

"And naturally you don't wish him to know that you have been there."

"That's the idea."

"How are you going to prevent it? You can't get into the house without the butler's knowing it, can you?"

"No; but I can fool the butler, all right. Will you do the trick with me?"

"Will I? Sure thing, Nick. I'm ready."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORK OF AN ELECTRIC DRILL.

Nick had a carriage waiting at the door of police headquarters, and with the inspector at his side, he was soon being driven rapidly uptown toward the great financier's home.

"Now, Nick," said the inspector, while they were thus engaged, "suppose you put me onto the whole layout."

"I don't want to do that, George, for the reason that I want to get your opinion upon several matters connected with it, without there being an opportunity of biasing your judgment by reason of a previous opinion expressed by me."

"All right."

"Remember that I will enter the room for the first time when we enter it together, so you will have the same opportunity that I do."

"You have already looked into the room, you say?"

"Yes; from the open doorway."

"And what did you see from there?"

"Merely that all three of the safes within that room had been blown open. I could not determine, from where I stood, whether the vault door had been tampered with or not."

"You cannot see it from the place where you stood?"

"No; it is down a flight of stairs at the other end of the room, and so out of sight."

"What did old Crœsus have to say about it?"

"He knew as little as I."

"What! Do you mean to say that he had not entered the room, either?"

"Yes."

"That's odd, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. He's an odd character, isn't he?"

The inspector turned a shrewd glance toward Nick, while he drawled in reply:

"Rather."

After that they rode on in silence until just before the carriage drew up in front of the door of the financier's home. Then the inspector remarked:

"How are you going to prevent that butler from telling his master that we have been here?"

"By not making any effort to do so."

"Eh? How is that?"

"Why, if the old man told the truth, the butler has no idea that a burglary has been committed, so he won't think there is anything to tell. He knew that his master telephoned for me this morning, and he was told, in my presence, to admit me at any time without question, as I had some special work to do there. He will simply admit us, conduct us to the library and go about his business. It will never occur to him that my call is not a part of the arrangements made this morning. He will not mention it to his master unless he is asked about it—and he won't be asked about it, that's all."

"Well, here we are."

As Nick had predicted, they were admitted and shown to the library without question; and as soon as they were alone Nick fastened the door which opened into the hallway and then quickly unlocked and threw open the door of the strong room.

"There you are," he said. "Look."

At the same moment he stepped back and thus permitted the inspector to cross the threshold in advance of him.

There they both came to a halt.

It was a strange sight that met their eyes.

The table, which has been described as occupying the center of the room, had been pushed considerably out of position, so that it extended diagonally across it. Three of the twelve chairs which ordinarily surrounded it, were overturned on the floor, two others were on the top of the table and the remainder had been crowded back against the wall in various attitudes, so that they would be out of the way.

On the floor in front of the safes, or thrust to one side of them, were bundles of bedding sufficient in quantity almost to stock a boarding house. Many of these articles were considerably blackened, showing what use they had been put.

"They had enough of that stuff to have muffled quite an explosion," remarked the inspector.

"Yes; and they evidently succeeded in muffling it too, for not a soul in the house heard a disturbance of any kind."

The inspector approached close to the largest of the three safes and examined it critically, while Nick stood watching him, with a smile on his face.

moment later, the inspector passed from that safe he next one, and after spending a few moments e, went to the third one; and all the while Nick d looking on, smilingly, but not once attempting nter upon any close examination for himself.

resently Inspector McClusky straightened up again looked around at Nick, and perceiving the smile on detective's face, he said:

"You had some reason to suspect what I have just overed, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What gave you your suspicion?"

"The fact that the noise of an explosion was not rd, and that there was no jar of the house sufficient waken the occupants."

"Humph! Nothing else?"

"Nothing else that is tangible."

"Have you looked down the stairway yet, toward door of the vault?"

"No; not yet."

"Neither have I; but I'll make you a bet about it."

"What? That we will find it in much the same con- on as these safes?"

"Yes."

"I think the same; but——"

"But what?"

"Why, according to every precedent, to the claims de by the companies who manufacture safes and lts, and by our own experiences, it would require burglar, even with the very best of tools at his nmand, a dozen hours or more to break into a vault nstructed after the manner of the one that is here."

"Yes; but with the tools that have been used here—my idea is correct—he ought to accomplish it in an ur."

"That is my idea."

"As a matter of fact, how long a time was this room observed?"

"About six and a half or seven hours. No more."

"Humph! Shall we look at the vault now?"

"I'm ready."

A glance down the iron stairway toward the vault r indicated that their admitted suspicions were correct. Down there, they discovered still more quantities of bedding; also, that the door of the vault had been drilled and blown open finally by the same magic means that had been employed on the safes.

The inspector was on the point of descending the stairs when the detective put out a hand and detained him.

"Don't old man," he said. "I wish you wouldn't—just yet."

"Why not?" asked the inspector, drawing back.

"I don't want to touch a thing in this room until I come into it with Logan himself."

"I see. Well, that is a good idea. I approve of it. All the same, there is something down there, on the floor in front of that door, which might tell us a lot about this new system of getting into a safe; eh?"

"Assuredly. But if it is there now, it should be there also when I return. Don't you think so?" and Nick smiled into the face of the inspector.

For a moment the two men stood looking into each other's eyes, and then the inspector slowly extended his hand.

"Nick," he said, "you're a corker. I hadn't thought of that."

"Hadn't you? It is what I brought you here for. That is why I wanted you here for a witness—aside, of course, from my wish to get your general opinion about the whole thing."

"We can discuss that at any time now. The point is that you expect that somebody else will enter this room between now and three o'clock."

"That's the point."

"Old Crœsus?"

"No; I hadn't gone that far yet."

"Who, then?"

"Some person who has possession of that fourth key to the strong room door."

"Are there four keys?"

"There are supposed to be only three, and I have those in my possession. Do you suppose, inspector, that there can be any other way than that door to enter this room?"

The inspector ran his eyes searchingly around the room, touching, it seemed, upon every inch of space upon walls, ceiling and floor.

"It would seem not," he remarked, presently.

"At least, there is none visible, is there?"

"Certainly not."

"Now, regarding that broken part of an implement which you saw at the foot of the steps which leads to the vault and which you were on the point of going down to inspect a little closer; do you think it necessary that we obtain a closer view of it at present?"

"No; I don't see what good it would do us."

"Nor I."

"An expert electrician might explain the principles of its working to you."

"Yes; if there happens to be an expert electrician in existence who knows anything about such a thing."

"Which is highly improbable, you would say."

"That is just exactly what I would say. The one thing that is perfectly plain to us both is that these safes and the vault were not drilled by the ordinary methods."

"Or, rather, say that they were not drilled at all."

"That is more like it. In fact, that they were burned."

"Sure."

"An electric current, producing heat so great that it has eaten, in a few moments, holes which could not have been drilled in a day, or a week. This is something new, inspector. But it is a fact, as we can plainly see."

CHAPTER V.

FOOTPRINTS ON THE STAIRS.

"Well, Nick, I am only a witness; what is the next move?"

"To arrange so that I will know positively if anyone visits this room between now and three o'clock."

"You seem to be in no hurry to leave it now."

"Oh, yes, I am. I am going now, if you are ready."

"I'm ready."

"Then, if you will step through that door into the library, I'll set my little trap."

The inspector complied, but paused in the door, and looked back, watching Nick.

Then the detective took a package from his pocket and having manufactured an impromptu blowpipe from a sheet of stiff paper he had brought with him from the table in the library, he proceeded to fill it to the brim with the delicate powder from the package.

The powder, as he poured it from the package into the improvised blowpipe was so delicate and light that it would scarcely flow at all, and even as the bulk of it fell into the receptacle he had arranged for it, it still formed a delicate cloud of almost impalpable dust around the detective's head.

When the pipe was filled the detective stepped to the center of the room, and placing the small end at his lips, blew a sharp blast through it.

Instantly the white powder was expelled from the pipe, and as it went forth it spread in a cloud toward the ceiling of the room and then began slowly to settle down.

Filling the blowpipe a second time, he stepped back nearer to the door, where the inspector was standing, and blew another blast in the same way.

Then, having filled it a third time, and sent the last blast of the powder from the doorway itself, he quickly stepped outside the room and closed and locked the door.

"There," he said, "I am afraid that the papers and other things will be somewhat dusty when there is occasion to handle them, but it is a kind of dust that will do no harm, and I am now absolutely certain that no person can enter that room before I do, without leaving traces of his presence that will be plainly visible to me."

"That is as sure as that eggs are eggs," remarked the inspector. "Now, what next?"

"To get away from here as quickly as possible."

Five minutes later they were in the carriage together and driving rapidly away.

* * * * * * *

The great financier and the detective met on the doorstep of the capitalist's house.

Nick Carter had approached at a swinging pace from around the corner, and the man of millions had descended at the door from his coupé.

Jared Logan looked at his watch, smiled and then extended his hand.

"I want to shake hands with the only man I know who can be as punctual as I can," he said, genially. "You are exactly on time, Mr. Carter."

"Certainly, sir."

They entered the library together and the financier pointed to a chair.

"I suppose you are ready to begin," he said to Nick.

"Yes; only, if you have no objections, there is one man whom I would like to have at my side during this first examination."

"One of your assistants?"

"No. Inspector McClusky."

The man of millions scowled.

"Why?" he asked. "Do you not consider yourself competent to handle the matter alone?"

"Entirely so, sir."

"Then why not do it?"

"Because, having thought the matter over, I have decided that I would like to have his opinion in support of mine; and you know there is no better man in the world, in his line, than George McClusky."

"Unless it is yourself, Mr. Carter."

"You are mistaken, sir. We work upon lines that are entirely different. McClusky works upon a mathematical proposition. He has an immense system at his command, and, relatively, he has the aid and support of every detective bureau in the country, while I work comparatively alone. He enters upon the average case as a pilot takes a boat into a harbor with which he is perfectly familiar; I work upon the average case as a skilled pilot would take a craft into a harbor he had never sounded. He hunts down men who are known to be criminals and who have left their pictures in his gallery, or their handiwork in some case he has before had to do with, or their records in some prison; I hunt for men who have not been taken in the commission of crimes before; for men who have never had their pictures taken for the rogues' gallery, and for men who have made no previous records. He sees the effect of a crime, and if it was committed by an old hand at the business, he recognizes who did it at once, but if it happens to be by one who has hitherto walked the straight and narrow path, he is almost as much at sea as you would be."

"Well, you see, Carter, I don't care to have a record of this affair on the police blotter."

"There shall be no record of it. The inspector will agree to that."

"Very well. Call him if you like."

Nick seized the telephone and soon had the inspector on the other end. Then, as if they had not seen each other for a month, he said:

"This is Carter. I am at the house of Jared Logan. He is consulting me about an incident that just now happens to interest him, and I have suggested to him that I would like to have you present with me. He has agreed to that. Can you come here at once? We will wait for you and you will be told what the subject of our controversy is when you arrive. What? Right away? All right. Good-by."

Twenty minutes later the inspector was shown into the room.

Nick greeted him as if there had been no previous meeting between them that day, and of course gave him the cue regarding his own wishes in that way.

In a few words the detective explained to the inspector what had happened and why he was called, and then rising, he added:

"And now, gentlemen, if you are ready, I think we will enter the room."

"We are ready," said the financier.

"Then, if you and the inspector will stand back for a moment, I would like to enter alone at first. I wish both of you to stand within sight of me, so that I can

call your attention to anything I desire to have you notice. If you will remain in the doorway that will be sufficient."

"All right," rejoined the inspector.

Taking one of the keys from his pocket, Nick threw open the door and passed through into the strong room.

He stepped forward very slowly, studying the floor, the walls, the top of the table, the chairs—everything there as he did so; but he had not taken four short steps when he paused, for directly in front of him on the floor, imprinted in the dust made by the fine powder he had blown about the room, was the perfect shape of a human foot.

It had been made by a foot, moreover, which was not shod when it was pressed there. A foot that had worn a stocking, but not a boot; and the first imprint discovered by the detective showed where the owner of that foot had turned to retrace his steps, as if he had for a moment been intent upon approaching the door through which the detective and his companions had just entered, but had changed his mind, turned about and gone in the other direction.

The reader must understand that these footprints were very indistinct; that they could not be seen at all unless the observer stood directly over them, and that the slightest breath of air disturbed the dust upon which they had been made.

From the doorway where the inspector and Mr. Logan were waiting, they could not be observed at all.

But the detective was careful to make no stir in the air—to create no draught which would disturb the dust in which the footprints were formed.

He took another step forward until he could see perfectly in what direction the footprints tended, and then he called the inspector to him.

"Inspector," he said, "I wish you would step here a moment. Ask Mr. Logan to wait where he is."

McClusky was instantly at his side, and Nick, knowing that the inspector needed not to be told why he had called him, began to indicate certain characteristics about the appearance of the safes, thus blinding the understanding of the man in the doorway, and at the same time giving the inspector an opportunity to examine the footprints on the floor.

He had no desire other than that the inspector should see the footprints at the present moment, but he did wish him to know that they were there, and also that would not permit their companion to discover them at least, not yet.

After a moment the inspector returned to the doorway and rejoined the financier, and at once Nick took the trail and followed it.

There were two interesting points about his discovery so far. One was that the room had been entered during the interval between eleven o'clock and three, and the other—and quite an important one—was that the entrance had not been made through the regular door.

Nick followed slowly along the path thus made for him until he saw that it led directly to the stairs which descended to the door of the vault, and there, at the head of the stairs, he halted again.

Careful examination showed him that the steps had first ascended the stairs and gone directly to the largest of the three safes; from there, they had approached the smallest of the safes, and from there they had visited the remaining one.

A jumble of marks in front of each safe showed that some time had been spent at each one, and at the smallest safe Nick was assured that the intruder had got down upon one knee for a moment.

From that safe, the footsteps returned to the stairway and descended; but they went only half of the way down, when they turned about and came back again.

This was the time when they crossed the floor in direct line toward the door into the library, halted when two-thirds of the way across, and returned directly to the stairs, again descending them; and this time, as nearly as Nick could determine from his position at the top of the stairs, they went to the bottom.

Here was a strange thing, and he paused for a moment to think it over before he proceeded.

he footsteps certainly began, and as certainly ended, the bottom of the vault stairs, and not in the room elf.

CHAPTER VI.

STOLEN: BONDS VALUED AT $255,000,000.

There was yet one further discovery which the de- tive made while he stood there at the head of the irs, and that was that the broken portion of the un- own instrument which the inspector had discovered ere, four hours earlier, had disappeared; and he iled as he turned and called the inspector to him e second time.

They were far away from the financier now, so that e detective could speak in a low tone of voice, and cordingly he said:

"You will notice that the instrument which inter- ted you is gone. Now, while I return to the door for rœsus, you descend the stairs and fan that powder way. I will do the same across the floor. I'll bring im back with me and we will all enter the vault to- ether. See all that you can see now, for it is the only hance we will have."

He returned to the doorway now, and rejoined the pitalist, who was awaiting him with ill-disguised im- atience; and he managed to disturb the footprints on he floor as he did so, in order that the banker might ot discover them.

"One would think that you expected to find the bur- lars waiting here for you," remarked Mr. Logan, with ronounced sarcasm.

"Not exactly that," replied Nick. "However, I did xpect to discover some evidence of his presence."

"You might have done that from the doorway. I ould see that much from where I stood."

"Oh, yes; but you know you could not see every- hing."

"Well, what have you discovered? Have the bur- lars succeeded in getting into the vault?"

Nick looked at his companion narrowly before he re- lied. Could it be possible that he detected a certain egree of eagerness in that question—as if the man of millions wished to hear that the vault had been en- tered—as if he were not sure that it had been entered, but nevertheless hoped that it had?

Whatever it was, it supplied a new train of thought for the detective, so that a second or two elapsed be- fore he replied, and the banker became impatient.

"Well," he repeated, impatiently, "has the vault been blown open also?"

"What would you say if it had, sir?" replied Nick.

"I should say that they were expert workmen who came here, and I should also bring suit against the firm that built that vault."

"Then you will have an opportunity to do so, for the vault is in the same condition as the safes."

"Good Heaven!"

"It is true."

"Then there is no end to what the scoundrels may have stolen."

"I suppose not. Were the securities which you kept here negotiable?"

"Many of them were?"

"And you may have lost—how much?"

"I have no idea. There were some things here that were more valuable to me than money."

"Then our next duty is to determine what is miss- ing, is it not?"

"I should say that it is about time."

"Yes; you have shown remarkable patience for a man who may be the loser of millions."

"Millions! More than that!"

"How so, Mr. Logan?"

"Why, because it is possible that the burglars may have stolen away a promise I have made."

"I don't think I understand you."

"You couldn't unless you had the handling of im- mense affairs, as I have."

"Still, I wish you would explain."

"To what end?"

"Why, you have engaged me to investigate this af- fair. In order to do so properly, I must know exactly what is missing—what is lost—what was here that might have been lost. I must know the whole story

in order to look for any possible motive which might have existed, more than the one merely for robbery, to induce burglars to make this attack."

"Humph!"

"For, you see there must have been a greater motive than mere robbery, or they would not have come here at all."

"I don't see how you make that out."

"Perhaps the search we will make will demonstrate it."

"Perhaps it will."

"Will you explain now what you meant by stating that there is a possibility that they might have stolen a promise you have made?"

"No; I'll wait and see if it has been stolen first."

"Very good. Where was this promise kept?"

"It isn't likely to be kept at all the way things look now."

"Very true, sir. However, until you are more explicit. I cannot call the idea you have expressed by any other name, so I will repeat, where was this promise kept? In one of the safes or in the vault?"

"It was kept in all three."

"In all three?"

"Yes. The promise, as you call it, was represented by certain documents—securities. I placed a certain part of them in each of the safes and another part of them in the vault."

"You divided them, therefore, into four parts; why?"

"Well, we will say that there were four parts to the promise and that I desired, for reasons of my own, to keep them separate."

"Well, here is the smallest of the safes in front of you. Will you be good enough to see if one of the quarters of that strange promise is still inside?"

Logan stooped over. Indeed, he laboriously got down upon one knee, placing it in almost precisely the same spot as that where Nick had discovered the imprint of a knee upon the floor.

For a moment he searched diligently among the sheets of paper which strewed the inside of the wrecked safe; and then he slowly rose to his feet.

"Gone!" he said, without a change of expression on his face, for it was an iron face that had done battle for so many years on 'Change that it had become schooled never to show a sign of the emotions which might be engendered behind it. Gone," he repeated, "and you can gamble that the other three parts are gone also."

"From the other safes and the vault, you mean?"

"Yes;" and the capitalist stooped over and brushed vigorously at the dust on the knee of his trousers.

"Where the devil did all this dust come from?" he asked. "It wasn't here before."

"When?" asked Nick.

"Why, when I was here last, of course—last night."

"What else is missing from that safe?" asked Nick.

"I don't know yet. Let's take a look at the vault first. We'll begin there, if you please, Mr. Carter. Naturally the most valuable of the possessions I kept in the house were in the vault."

"Very well."

They found the inspector awaiting them at the bottom of the stairs.

"I haven't gone inside the vault," he said, "although I might easily have done so, for the door is opened wide enough. This is a wonderful piece of work on this door. I have been examining it."

"Yes," said Mr. Logan, "I always thought it was a wonderful till now; but if it can be set at naught in a few hours' time——"

"I did not refer to the work of building the vault," interrupted the inspector, "but to the work of demolishing it."

"Oh! Well, I suppose that is wonderful also; although I think I should apply another adjective. I should call it a damnable piece of work."

The inspector laughed.

"You do not view it from the standpoint of a professional," he said.

"No; I look at it from the standpoint of a loser."

"Do you understand anything about electricity, Mr. Logan?" asked Nick.

at the devil has electricity got to do with this
demanded the capitalist.
hing, perhaps. I was thinking only of the ex-
arily heavy wiring you have got around this
Was it necessary to have it so heavy?"
ever inquired. I gave out the contract for the
hing, and when it was done I paid the bill; that
know about it."
d you naturally supposed that to be quite suffi-
I suppose."
ought to be. Now, if you gentlemen will be
ough to permit me to enter my own vault, and
e notes while I call out to you, I will speedily
you with what is missing."
inside of the vault was roomy. There were two
inside it and these Nick and the inspector oc-
while Jared Logan began his inventory.
f the detectives was provided with a pad, and
these they made notes of everything that was
and everything that was missing, while Nick,
held the list with which the banker had pro-
him, in his hand, checked off the several articles
were called out.
hat way nearly two hours were consumed; and
the inventory of the vault was completed, the
ere visited and inventoried in the same manner,
it was quite six o'clock by the time that part
ur work was finished.
," said Nick, when they had at last completed
immediate labors, "I think, by comparing my
with these lists in my hands, I can tell you
papers among those that are missing represented
ones to which you referred."
all right; tell it. Let's hear you make a guess."
promise you referred to was represented by the
of the Great American Natural Ore Corpora-
"You've hit it the first time."
according to these notes we have made, those
the value of two hundred and fifty-five mil
dollars are missing—from the vault and the three

"Right again, Carter. You're a wonder. Now, perhaps you can tell me something else."

"What else?"

"How I am to recover them. You see," he added, calmly, "if I don't get them back right away I shall engage the services of an undertaker, and provide him with a corpse."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET OF THE STRONG-ROOM STAIR.

"Two hundred and fifty-five million dollars' worth of bonds is quite a sum," said the inspector, uttering a low whistle.

"Particularly when they were left in your care, and were not your personal property," said Mr. Logan.

"But you surely do not mean that you would think of taking your own life if they could not be recovered," said Nick.

"I surely do mean that very thing. The entire value of the bonds is not lost, understand. They are negotiable, it is true, but wide advertising would warn any person from purchasing them. That is not the point."

"What is the point?"

"Well, I dare not confess that they are missing. I dare not advertise the fact that they have been stolen. I am in the position of being placed between an irresistible force and an impassable barrier—pretty certain to be crushed in the mix-up."

"How so?"

"Because, in the first place, I dare not let it be known that the bonds are not still in my possession, and in the second place, if they are not back again in my possession by the evening of the day after to-morrow, my word of honor to my business associates is broken, and—well, I shall not live to tell them so, that's all there is about it."

"You take it coolly."

"Why not? It won't help it any to get hot, will it?"

"No."

"I will tell you this much about it. Three bonds were deposited with me, personally, at my own earnest

solicitation. I have been working for almost three years to consummate a certain enormous deal of which those bonds are the basis. In consummating it, I have had to harmonize certain elements that were almost impossible to bring together. By continued effort I have at last succeeded so far that I have made an arrangement whereby the parties directly concerned are to meet here in this room and conclude the deal."

"To-night?" asked Nick, remembering that he had said that there was to be a meeting there that evening.

"No; to-morrow night. The meeting to-night is on the same matter, but is only a part of it. The bonds will not have to appear to-night; but to-morrow night they must be forthcoming. If not——"

"Well? If not?"

"If not, why then the Angel Gabriel could not succeed in convincing my associates that the bonds were not stolen with my connivance. I will be ruined in pocket for one thing, but I could stand that. I am worth something over a hundred millions, as I stand, I suppose, but I could lose it all and begin over without a tremor. That's the kind of a man I am; but there is one thing which I could not lose—and live."

"What is that?"

"Well, some people would call it by the name of honor; but it goes deeper than that."

"How can it go deeper than that?"

"Because it involves some solemn promises which I have made to certain warring factions among the men of wealth and affairs with whom I associate. I cannot explain more fully than that, only to say that if my word is broken—and it will be broken if the bonds are not here, no matter for what reason they might be missing—only to say that if my word is broken in this matter, nothing on earth or in heaven could ever convince my associates that I am not personally responsible for the breaking. That is all. Find the bonds for me, Mr. Carter, and I will cheerfully give you a million dollars—ay, two millions. Find them and place them in my hands before eight o'clock to-morrow night, and I will give each of you a million dollars."

There was no mistaking the earnestness of the man.

Outwardly he was as cool as ever; but each detectives could see that a great excitement, alm much for him to bear, was raging underneat surface.

Nick looked at the inspector and the inspector l at Nick, and then Mr. Logan continued:

"It is a great deal to ask of you, I know. It is than it seems possible to expect that you can d yet, I suppose it is possible to do it."

He paused in order to take two or three deep b and then continued:

"You thought it strange, Carter, that I should had the wisdom and the strength of purpose t out of this room until you had examined it, but I instinctively, that those bonds were gone; I knew if there was a man on earth who might recover if they were gone, that man was you; I knew t order to work at your best I must not put e feather in your way. I am accustomed to self-r sion. I can control myself, even under the great which has almost ingulfed me to-day, and yo never know how great it has been. Even the which have occurred since this morning, have s to me useless, but I had made up my mind to le work in your own way and to do everything you me to do. My offer to let you go into this room and spend the day here in my absence was, or s have been, proof of that. You do not realize great a confidence that was for me to repose man. I would not extend that privilege to my

"But it was all with a sense of the realization o had happened before my eyes.

"Now, gentlemen, I am face to face with a t calamity. I am like one who is standing in front on-rushing locomotive and am paralyzed—witho power to move. If either of you or both of yo the power to lift me off the track, for God's sake

"I can say no more. You have heard my of will stand by it, and consider the service cheaply if you can perform it. If the sum is not enough give more—only find those bonds and place them hands before eight o'clock to-morrow night.

...e; let us return to the library and talk there. ...om oppresses me."

...oved to the doorway, but at the threshold Nick ...ked.

... Logan," he said, "I want you to do some-...

...at is it?"

...re are the three keys which fit the lock on this ... I want you to take them. Here they are."

... are not going to abandon the case?" asked the ...st, in affright.

... by any means. Now, if you and Inspector ...sky will pass into the library and leave me here, ... consider it a favor."

...y, we can do that; certainly."

...ish you to lock this door after you and leave ...e, locked in this strong room. I wish you and ...ector to seat yourselves in the library and to ...e me that neither of you will leave it until I ... you. I want you to promise me that you will ...tiently until I do summon you; that you will not ... the door of the strong room, in order to hasten ...ements, no matter how long I may be in here. ...t, I want you to wait patiently with the inspec-... with the three keys to this door in your hands, ... summon you to unlock it. Will you do that?"

...ly, of course I will do it."

...d will you keep him company, inspector?"

...e thing, Nick."

...e'll wait right here. We won't move out of this ... until you rap to be let out," asserted Mr. Logan. ...ry good. Don't forget. Now, lock the door. ... you later."

... instant the door was locked, Nick Carter turned ...mal back to the stairs which descended to the ...door.

... stairs were of iron and were set in solid ...—that is, in stone and cement: and Nick knew ...ond that veneering of stone and cement there ... thickness—he did not know how much—of ... steel.

Nevertheless he began without delay to strain at the iron steps with his hands and arms, as if he expected easily to lift them from their places.

But although he tried each one separately, and many times, and from every conceivable position, not one of them would budge an inch.

"And yet," he remarked, presently desisting in his efforts for a moment, "it is certain that there is a way out of here, and that that method should be operated from this side as well as from the other. The man who came in here during the afternoon did not enter by the door; he did enter by the way of these stairs, and it is certain that he came somehow from beneath them."

The walls where the stairs descended were also of iron, forming one continuous sheet on each side of the steps, and when Nick had arrived at the determination that the stairs could not be made to move, he applied himself to the walls.

Nothing moved, or gave, or budged, and the detective paused again.

Suddenly he darted forward and with one spring cleared the distance between him and the space at the bottom in front of the door of the vault.

Then, turning, he bent over and, seizing the bottom step in his hand, he applied all his great strength to it and lifted.

At first it appeared not to move at all, and yet there seemed to be an indication that it was not as solid as the steps were when taken separately, and he tried again.

This time there was a suggestion of success. The whole flight of steps seemed to give a little in his grasp.

He released his hold, straightened up and rested a moment, and then he bent to the task a second time.

This time he shut his jaws together, braced himself as well as he could, and then pulled.

From beyond the steps—somewhere in the depths of the wall behind them—there sounded a grating noise, and then a sharp crack, as if iron had been broken; and then the entire flight of eleven iron stairs rose in his hands so easily that a child might have

lifted them; and in front of him, under the stairs, was revealed a narrow aperture, through which he easily passed, presently closing the strange exit again behind him.

He had gone from the strong room, and he had left no trace behind him of the way he took.

* * * * * * *

The great financier and the inspector were still discussing the robbery when there came a sharp rap against the panels of the door which communicated with the hallway.

"Who in the devil is that?" asked the capitalist, angrily. "I don't want to be disturbed just now. It was at the hall door, wasn't it?"

"Yes; you had better see who it was," replied the inspector.

Mr. Logan rose and strode angrily to the door. Then he threw it open, but only to stagger back into the room again, with a cry of amazement and unbelief.

Nick Carter stood upon the threshold, facing him.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHOWING HOW THE THING WAS DONE.

Even the inspector, although in a measure prepared for what had happened, was astonished by the celerity with which the detective had acted in discovering a way out of the strong room other than by means of the door.

But he leaned back in his chair and said nothing, content to gaze upon the impromptu tableau which the sudden appearance of Nick Carter upon the scene had induced; and there was a quiet smile of expectancy upon his face, for he was sufficiently familiar with the methods of the little giant to understand that Nick's desire to have him there as a witness, and the utility of the delicate powder were only parts of a plan which he had already outlined in his mind, doubtless during his first conversation with the magnate.

"How, in the name of all that is wonderful, did you get out of that room?" gasped the man of mil as soon as he could find speech.

"My dear sir," replied Nick, advancing into room and dropping with a sigh into a convenient "there is a quotation from Shakespeare which supply an answer to that question. However, not trouble you with it, more than to distort it what by saying that there are more things in the osophy of some of your friends than you ever dre of when you had that strong room constructed."

"Explain what you mean by that, sir, if you pl pleaded Mr. Logan.

"Presently. All in good time. First, let m you how much time we have before you expe gentleman whom you were to receive to-night?"

Logan glanced at his watch.

"They should be here in about an hour, I think replied.

"Then," said Nick, "inasmuch as we are not that we will be entirely ready to receive them hour, I will ask you to ring for the butler and that your friends be told that you have not y rived home—that is, of course, in case we ar through by that time—and that they be taken int drawing room to await you there."

Mr. Logan raised no quesion regarding the pediency of this move, but did as he was reques do without delay.

"Now," he said, when the butler had receive orders—"now, for mercy's sake, do not keep suspense any longer. Tell me how you escaped that room while the only door to it is locked a I hold the keys to it. How did you do it?"

"I did it because there is another means tha door of entering and leaving the room. I hav covered that other way out, and I made use of i

"But ——"

"Wait, sir. First tell me who was your archit that extension to your dwelling? Who drew the and engaged the workmen for it?"

"Philander Morrison. He is considered one of best, if not the very best, architect in the city."

Sure; and I think he has in this case proved his
m to the title. Did he engage the contractor to
the work, or did you?"

He did. I made the contract directly with him—
nusual proceeding, I know, but that is the way it
done—and he did the rest."

Who was that contractor? Or, who were the con-
ors?"

Forbes & Robertson."

Good. Now which one—Mr. Forbes or Mr. Rob-
n—gave this particular job his personal atten-
?"

Why, both of them."

Do you mean to say that both Mr. Forbes and Mr.
rtson attended in person to the building of that
sion, to the construction of that vault, and to the
generally, until it was completed and ready to
over to you?"

Yes, sir; I do."

Very good. Now I will ask the inspector to do me
or;" and Nick turned to his friend, the greatest
of detectives that New York has ever had, bar
e.

What do you want me to do for you now?" asked
ector McClusky.

I think you know without my saying a word, don't
?" was Nick's reply.

You want Mr. Philander Morrison, the architect,
also Messrs. Forbes and Robertson, brought here
his room, don't you?"

Exactly that. If you will call up your office over
phone at your elbow, and direct that two of your
be sent for each of the three men I want here,
that they are instructed to bring them here if they
to use stretchers to do it, that will about fill the
Have them brought in through the side entrance
directly to this room."

I'll have them here inside of an hour, all right, if
are in the city," said the inspector, with a smile.

They are in the city, all of them," interjected the
naire.

How do you know that?" asked Nick.

"Because I had them all on the phone from my office to-day."

"To tell them what had happened here?" exclaimed Nick.

"By no means, sir. To tell them that I was thinking seriously of having some changes made in the present construction, and that I would like to consult with them to-morrow. You see, I wanted to have that débris cleared away before to-morrow night, and I thought I would be prepared for it."

"That's all right. Now, George, we will wait while you give your orders to your office."

They had not long to wait. The orders were presently delivered over the phone, and then the magnate turned expectantly again to the detective.

"Inspector," said Nick, "isn't it true that Philander Morrison, aside from being an architect, is also an inventor of considerable repute?"

"Yes. He owns a number of electrical inventions of his own."

"I thought so. Now, Mr. Logan."

"Yes, sir. I hope you have got around to me at last."

"I want you to be perfectly open and frank with me, as I will be with you, in the questions and answers to follow."

"Very well, sir."

"I will begin by telling you frankly that at the outset of this case I was of the opinion that you had robbed yourself."

"Good God! sir——"

"Hush! We have agreed to be perfectly frank. We must be so if we accomplish what you wish done. I began by suspecting that you were the robber; that your room was entered and wrecked at your own connivance. Such things have happened in my experience."

"I cannot imagine it."

"You could if you were in my business. I asked you about the keys. You said that two of the three keys had never been used, but I wished to satisfy myself that they had not, and accordingly I got the keys in my

possession. I did satisfy myself that two of them had not been used, at least not in a long time. A microscopic examination established that fact to my satisfaction. I then decided that either there was a fourth key to the room, or that the key you carried in your pocket had opened the door for the burglars, or—that there was another and a separate means of entrance and exit to and from that room. Taken altogether, the last seemed to me to be the most logical explanation."

"I should have called it the most illogical of all."

"Not if you had been in my place and I in yours, and you had suspected me of having had the vault built for the express purpose of robbing it at some future day."

"But, man, you suspected that I was a scoundrel."

"Sure I did. Don't lose your temper."

The magnate smiled grimly, and then said:

"Go ahead. I won't."

"I suspected that your willingness to leave me in that strong room all day alone, among your private papers and whatever else might be there, was a bluff which, as a character reader, you knew perfectly well I would not call; and I didn't call it."

"But I have explained——"

"Yes; since then. I know now, since you talked to us about the seriousness of the predicament in which you find yourself, that it was not a bluff; but all the same it put me on the right track, for I determined at that moment that I would go into that room without your knowledge."

"Ah! You did, eh?"

"Yes. When I left you downtown, after having secured the three keys, I went after the inspector and we came here together, and we entered that room and looked it over pretty thoroughly together."

"The devil you did!"

"We did. I wanted the inspector with me for obvious reasons. We understand each other perfectly, and we make a fairly good team when we work side by side."

"I should say you did."

"Very well. We discovered, first, that it was not strange that your family had not been disturbed by noise of any explosion during the night, for the re that there had been no explosion sufficiently loud have awakened a sleeper in this library, let alone distant sleeping rooms of the house."

"But how——"

"The three safes and the vault were not drilled the usual way, and there were no explosives used were loud enough to have awakened a sleeping in the hallway of the house. What explosives used were intended only to leave the evidence of use behind them, in order to blind such inexperienc persons as Inspector McClusky and myself. It simply a case, on the part of the burglars, of vault ambition o'erleaping itself."

"I comprehend. How were the safes opened?"

"They were burned open."

"Burned open?"

"Yes; with electricity. About four years ago a chine was invented by a Frenchman which produce heat so intense that it eats through iron or steel with same facility that the heat of a blowpipe would through cheese. You could write your name thro eight-inch armor plate with this machine, almost as as you could move the instrument to form the lette

"Incredible."

"Nevertheless true. The daily papers have had counts of it. The only difficulty in its use consiste the danger to the operator, who not only ran the of burning off his hand or his arm, or his leg, but blinding himself, for the light from it is so intense it would strike the sight out of any pair of eyes stantly."

"Well, sir?"

"It needed only a glance on the part of the inspe and myself to determine that this burglary had committed by a person who had discovered a me of seeing without eyes to see with; by a person cased in insulated garments that he could use the chine without especial danger, and by one who had vised some method of saving his eyes."

And that is the way my safes and my vault were ed; eh?"

Yes; that is the way. Your timelock is uninjured; s simply been removed by burning the iron around d then lifting it out. The bolts were removed e same manner. The safes were opened in the manner.

I have told you that almost a glance satisfied us is fact; but I was convinced that if you were the y party—that is, if it were done at your connivand if your suggestion that you leave me here were only a bluff, that you would visit this room before the time for us to meet here at three ck.

I had the keys to the room. If there was a fourth it was likely that you knew it and owned it. When inspector and I came to this room and entered the g room, after we had made all the examination ared to, I covered everything in that room with a powder which, if any person trod upon it, would y the fact through the impression it would re-. You afterward complained of that powder as . Do you remember?"

Perfectly."

Well, that dust was the powder I had placed there tray any person who should enter the room be-n eleven o'clock and three. Then, upon leaving room, I fixed the keyhole so that if another key thrust into it before I returned, I would know it.

The point of the whole thing is, that when we came at three o'clock, I knew that a fourth key had not thrust into that keyhole; but when we entered the m, there were footprints on the powder, which as-ed me that some person had been inside the room ce I had been there. So, you see, I knew there wa other entrance."

CHAPTER IX.

WHO IS THE MAN?

After a short pause, the detective continued:

I still suspected you—perhaps more strongly than

"To add to that suspicion, when you were examining the smallest of the safes, you got down upon one knee in front of it exactly as the man who came there secretly had done, and you put your knee exactly on the same spot, moreover.

"I thought then that you were guilty; but a few moments later, when you were explaining what had been lost, and when you were describing what those promises were, your earnestness made me waver in my suspicions. Before you finished, I was convinced of your sincerity; but all the time I was determined to put you to another test.

"I knew that there was a secret entrance to the strong room. It was unlikely that such a thing could exist without your knowledge—and yet, illogical as it appears, such a condition came within the range of possibility; and as I say, I determined to put you to another test.

"The footprints left in the powder I had spread in the room, and which I was tracing while you waited in the doorway, established the fact that the secret entrance was in some way connected with the stairs which lead down to the vault. I believed that I could find it without much delay, and so I directed that you lock me inside the room while I left the inspector with you in order that you would not leave the library while I was so engaged.

"The inspector knew perfectly well why I remained behind, and why I wished him to remain with you. If you had sought to leave this room during that time, he would have detained you. He was, however, I think, surprised that I appeared at the hall door as soon as I did.

"I found the secret entrance. I will show you later where it is, but it is sufficent for our purposes now to state that it goes under the stairs and thence by a narrow corridor to the outer wall of the house, where there is a stone in the foundation which works like a door, and which opens on the side street. I had only to be assured that no person was passing at the time, in order to step out unobserved, close it again, apply at the front door and ring the bell in the usual way;

so you see, sir, that your strong room could at any time since you erected it have been entered from the street by any person who happened to know the secret.

"When I tapped against the hall door of this room, I heard the inspector ask you to ascertain who was there; and the final test to which I had determined to subject you, was the manner of your reception of me when you discovered that it was I.

"Need I say, sir, that I was instantly entirely convinced that you knew nothing of the secret entrance?"

"I hope not. I hope you are convinced."

"I am, sir; and also that we can find your bonds within the time you have specified."

"Heaven be praised! I hope so."

"Now, sir; I think you know who stole those bonds."

"By thunder, Carter! If you are going to——"

"Listen. I think you know who stole those bonds, or who directed that they should be stolen, and who now has them in his possession; but—I do not think you are aware that you know it."

"I will confess that that statement is quite beyond me."

"Think a moment. You never had a suspicion of that secret entrance to the strong room, did you?"

"Certainly not."

"Very well: there are those persons in the world, or at the least, two persons, who must know of its existence."

"Whom?"

"The architect, and both—or at least one of—the contractors. It could not have been constructed without their knowledge."

"True, by thunder!"

"That is why I have asked the inspector to have them brought here."

"I see."

"But that does not dispose of the idea that you know who stole the bonds."

"Why, one of those three."

"Not at all. In fact, I doubt if two of them even suspect that such a thing has happened, or ever would happen! I refer to the contractors."

"And the architect?"

"He is an inventor and an electrician as well as architect. I shouldn't wonder if he has some g knowledge of the transaction. If he has, we will s find it out when he is brought here."

"Perhaps he will refuse to come."

"Don't worry about that," interposed the inspec quietly. "He will be here all right."

"Now," continued Nick, "we must still return to suggestion that you know who is behind all of th

"I begin to see light," exclaimed the magnate. ahead, Mr. Carter."

"Who, among the richest men of your associates the most unscrupulous? Who, among them, w have the greatest incentive, at this particular time deprive you of those bonds? You have offered million dollars for their recovery; now who, am your acquaintances, and among the men who know value of those bonds to you, would be willing to five millions, or even ten millions, to get them ou your possession at this particular time? Do you kn such a man?"

The magnate started to his feet, but Nick raised hand to prevent him from speaking.

"Wait," he said. "Let me finish."

"Go on," said the magnate, hoarsely.

"Who, when your strong room was contracted could have had the knowledge to provide him with foresight to anticipate this moment? Who had money, the audacity and the power, the influence courts and judges, with police commissioners and all the powers in municipal authority, to dare to gest such a thing to reputable men like this archi and these contractors—to pay them fortunes for parts of the work, and to promise them immunity fr punishment if by any chance their villainy should discovered.

"Who could say to them: 'You will never be con victed. I will see to that. Or if you are, I will see t it that you are pardoned, and remember that you wil be rich men. You will have one million, or two m lions, or five millions each, as the case may be.'

d and would say all that to these men, and so pur-e their co-operation?

"Wait; there cannot be many such men. I doubt if ng all your acquaintances there can be more than . I know that rich men, dealing in mammoth en-rises, are unscrupulous in the means they employ ccomplish their ends, but this thing goes rather ond the pale of precedent.

"Wait; I am not quite through. I want you to take consideration every question I have propounded, onsider carefully, and then to answer carefully, for e that you have already decided what name to er."

"Why," exclaimed the banker, "there is only one man in all the world! Only one."

"And his name? Utter it. Don't be afraid."

"Afraid? I should say not."

"Well, what is the name?"

"Daniel J. Dean."

"Very good. I suspected it. One of the richest en in New York, if not in all the world. Now, is he e of the men whom you expect to come here to-ight?"

"No."

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"And he is the man who will put the screws on if you o not produce those bonds at that meeting?"

"He is."

"Well, I prophecy that you will be able to pro-uce them when they are called for. I will engage at he will deliver them to me, and that I will in turn and them to you, before the time for that meeting. ow——"

They were interrupted by a rap at the door, and n opening it, Inspector McClusky's men, with the chitect and the two contractors in charge, appeared the doorway.

CHAPTER X.

NOT FOR ANOTHER MILLION.

"Step inside, gentlemen," said Nick, rising. "We were expecting you. Inspector, will you inform these men—if they have not already been told—that they are under arrest?"

"What does this mean? This is an outrage!" exclaimed Morrison, the architect; but Nick paid no attention to him. He stepped over and whispered something in the ear of the inspector, who at once turned to his own men, and said:

"Search your prisoners. Relieve them of everything they've got about them; papers and all. Especially weapons. We don't care to have any attempted suicides in this house."

Notwithstanding their pleading, their protestations of rage and their anger, the three men were searched, after which all but one of the officers who came with them were dismissed into the hallway to wait until the proceedings were over.

"Now," said Nick, addressing them, "it is entirely unnecessary to tell you why you are here, and why you are under arrest. Bluff won't go with this outfit at all, and the only thing which can possibly stand in your favor at all, is a free and full confession from each of you."

"Confession of what? What in——" blurted out the architect.

"That will do, sir," said Nick. "I have already informed you that bluff will not go with us. Neither will the promise from your employer that you will not be prosecuted, for you will be, all of you, unless——" He hesitated an instant, and then added, slowly: "Neither will the money you have been paid for your work be of service to you, for you will be compelled to give it up. Now, Mr. Morrison, where do you keep your insulated clothes, and the strange mask you use to shield your eyes when you open vaults and safes?"

The architect staggered back as if he had received a blow, stood thus for an instant, and then broke down and wept.

The contractors turned white to the lips, looked into

each other's faces for an instant, and then sank into chairs which had been placed for their use.

The detective continued, mercilessly:

"Shall I call to mind the transactions you have entered into with Daniel J. Dean, gentlemen? Shall I take you into the strong room, planned by you, Morrison, and erected by you two, Forbes and Robertson? Shall I show you the secret entrance under the vault stairs, and conduct you through it to the opening in the foundation of the house? Shall I show you, Morrison, how you came into that room this afternoon again?"

A groan from Morrison was the only answer.

"Would you all like to see the wonderful work that was done in that strong room last night by Mr. Morrison? You, Forbes and Robertson, do not know what he did, but I will tell you, so that you will know how he has betrayed you."

"No! Don't, for God's sake, don't!" cried Morrison.

"He entered that room last night," continued Nick, pitilessly. "With his electrical boring and burning machine, he totally wrecked three safes and a vault. He wantonly destroyed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of property; and he stole——"

"No! no! no! For God's sake, stop!" beseeched Morrison. "I did not steal. I did all that you have said, but I did not steal."

"No," said Nick. "But you looked on complacently while your companions did the stealing. Shall I tell who those companions were, or will you?"

"I will tell, sir; everything, if you will have mercy."

"Mercy? Ask for that after we discover how thorough your confession is. Who was with you when you destroyed the safes and the vault? Who took the bonds, if you did not?"

"Mr. Dean and his private secretary, sir."

"Correct. Who came with you when you returned to that room this afternoon to take away a broken part of your electrical instrument which you had forgotten in your hurry when you were there before?"

"Nobody, sir. I came alone."

"Where are the stolen bonds now?"

"They are in my keeping, sir; but I did not take them. Mr. Dean insisted that I should take charge of them for him. He did not wish to keep them in his possession at all—at least, until after——"

"Until after to-morrow night, you would say?"

"Yes."

"I can understand that. So he left them with you, did he? Do you know their value?"

"No, sir. I don't even know what bonds they are. They are locked in a tin box and are in my safe at the Finance and Credit Company's safe-deposit vaults."

"Subject at any time, I suppose, to the demand of Mr. Dean?"

"To his demand through me; yes, sir."

"But not to his direct order?"

"No."

"Very good. I will ask you to go with Inspector McClusky, presently, and to deliver them to him. He will see that they are returned to their owner."

Nick turned then to the contractors, who had listened to all that had been said in a dazed sort of way, looking first at each other and then at the men who confronted them.

"Now, Forbes, and you, Robertson," said Nick coldly, "my business with you is very short. I require of each of you a full, written, signed and sworn confession of everything connected with this affair from the moment when you were first approached in regard to the construction of the secret entrance to the strong room of Mr. Logan's house. I want nothing left out of that confession. You must begin at the moment when the idea was suggested to you by the architect, and you must trace out every detail that was connected with Mr. Dean.

"I need not tell you that I will know if you err in your relation of the story—if you leave anything unsaid, or if you dare to say anything that is not strictly true. I want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Mr. Logan, have you a stenographer in the house?"

"I have."

"Summon him."

"Now," Nick continued, when the stenographer

red, "I will take you, one by one, into the strong
m with me, so that you will each tell your story
rately. You will understand, therefore, how nec-
ry it is that each of you tells only the truth. Mor-
n, you will come first, if you please, for I want you
go to the safe deposit vaults with the inspector
nce."

"But the place is closed now. We cannot get
o it."

"Tut, man! The inspector will find a way to get at
safes. The outer door has no time lock upon it,
I happen to know. Come."

And so, one by one, the three men were taken into
adjoining room where they made their confessions
the stenographer, after which they were written out
the typewriter, and so finally signed and sworn to
each guilty man.

While all this was under accomplishment, Jared
gan, happy now that his bonds were again in sight
now that he knew positively that they would be in
possession before half-past eight the succeeding
ght—excused himself and went to the drawing room
the great mansion where the gentlemen, whom he
d expected to meet that evening, were awaiting him
ith impatience.

Whatever that meeting was, its business was con-
luded in short order, for, by the time the confessions
ere completed and sworn to, he was back again.

When all the preliminaries were completed, Nick
oke again:

"Morrison," he said, "you will go with the inspector,
I have directed. He will keep you in custody until
e morning of the day after to-morrow, when, if Mr.
gan makes no charge against you, you will be set
ee. You and your associates, Forbes and Robertson,
ill be asked to disgorge enough of your ill gotten
ains to replace the property in the strong room, in
he condition it was before you attacked it. Other
han that, I think your absence from the city of New
rk will be all that the inspector will ask of you, or
ll that Mr. Logan will require, for the reason that
e prefers to have this matter kept silent, if possible.

"Forbes, and you, Robertson, will be taken by the men who conducted you here to the headquarters of police, where you will be detained until the morning of the day after to-morrow.

"The same conditions which I have applied to Morrison, apply to each of you. Of course, it is no affair of mine if Mr. Dean should require you to give up some of the wealth he has given you. I could force him to let you keep it, but, of course, I will not do so. My advice to you is to get out of the city and out of the country as soon as you can, and to forget, if you can, all that has happened here.

"Mr. Logan's business requires that as little as possible of this affair should become known, and, if any of it is known, you will go to Sing Sing, everyone of you.

"This is all. You may go now."

* * * * * * *

The magnate and the detective were alone together. The others had gone.

"Mr. Carter," said the capitalist, "I have never supposed it possible for a man to be as happy as you have made me this night. At the very moment of utter despair, every cloud is dispelled, and I find myself a hundred times better off than if my vault had not been entered and my bonds had not been stolen."

"How is that?" asked Nick.

"Because now I can force the only man I feared—Dean—to do as I have long wished him to do. I wished to be fair to the small investors, but he has been determined to rob them, from the first. Now, I can compel him to play fair."

"Then it is a good thing all around, is it not?"

"You bet it is. I shall not forget my promise to you and to the inspector. The checks will be ready for you at ten o'clock in the morning."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now, is there anything more that I can do for you?"

"Yes; one thing."

"What is it?"

"I would like to be present when you produce those bonds at the meeting, to-morrow night, for, as I understand it, you do not intend, as things have turned out, to say anything about this matter, even to Dean."

"Most certainly I do not."

"You merely intend to produce the bonds at the proper time."

"Exactly that."

"I would like to see old Dean's face when you do it."

"You shall."

"But how?"

"It is part of my duty, in case the transaction goes through, as I have wished it to do, and it will go through now, to name another director. I shall make you a present of some of those bonds, and also of some of the stock, when it is issued, and you shall be present at the meeting, as that director."

"Good! Then I will see old Dean's face."

"That you shall."

* * * * * * *

The strong room had been cleared of the débris.

New safes, exactly like the one that had been destroyed, had been introduced into the room, and the entrance to the vault, being out of sight, gave no indication of the havoc that had been wrought there so recently.

The long table through the center of the room was surrounded by the richest men of the city of New York.

At the head of the table, Jared Logan was seated, and at the opposite end sat Daniel J. Dean.

Nick Carter was there, too, sitting at Mr. Logan's right hand.

Then the crucial moment arrived.

Mr. Dean, at the lower end of the table, rose in his place, and, in a voice that was like the clink of ice in a goblet, said:

"Gentlemen, we seem to have agreed to everythi but I have yet a word to say. I know that I shall s prise many of you, and that I shall offend Logan what I am about to state, but I feel that I have a d to perform."

He paused an instant as if to emphasize what he w saying, and then continued:

"I have reason to believe that Logan has not act square with us. I have reason to believe that the bon which we require for this arrangement are not n in his possession. How I know that, or what reaso I may have for making this statement, does not matt I do make it, and I desire that he be required for with to produce those bonds, or to explain why he c not do so."

Quiet glances were exchanged between the m around the table, as if some of them had received inkling of what position Dean intended to take; an while they were exchanging their knowing looks, Jar Logan pulled open the door of the smallest safe, whi stood within reach of his hand.

From it he took a bundle from which he quickly r moved the covers.

"I am delighted," he said, slowly, "to be in a po tion to disappoint Dan Dean. Here are the bonds, ge tlemen. Shall we proceed?"

Daniel Dean started to his feet with a cry of amaz ment. He stretched forth one hand as if to seize t bonds to inspect them, but he suddenly clutched his breast, and then, with a moan, sank back into h chair, unconscious.

He had fainted.

And Nick Carter leaned over the table and whi pered to Mr. Logan:

"I wouldn't have missed it for another million."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 398, will contain "The T rible Game of Millions; or, Tracking Down the Pl ters." Don't miss it. In it you will read of a n plot in high financial circles, and how Nick Carter w concerned in it.

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